

An INTRODUCTION to Practical Oral Care for People With Developmental Disabilities

Developmental disabilities such as autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and mental retardation are present during childhood or adolescence and last a lifetime. They affect the mind, the body, and the skills people use in everyday life: thinking, talking, and self-care. People with disabilities often need extra help to achieve and maintain good health. Oral health is no exception.

Over the past three decades, a trend toward deinstitutionalization has brought people of all ages and levels of disability into the fabric of our communities. Today, approximately 80 percent of those with developmental disabilities live in community-based group residences or at home with their families. Together with their caregivers, they now look to practitioners in the community for dental services.

Providing oral care to patients with disabilities, however, is not without its challenges—or its rewards. Variations in mental capacity, behavior, and physical ability, for example, call for flexibility and creativity in the operatory. Some adaptation of the skills you use every day is also necessary to ensure safe and effective patient care. When the dental team is informed and prepared, most people with mild or moderate developmental disabilities can be treated successfully in the general practice setting.

Practical Oral Care for People With Developmental Disabilities is a series of publications designed to equip dental professionals with the basic information they need to deliver quality oral health care to people with special needs. This includes instilling confidence not only in treatment strategies, but also in the dental team's entire approach to the patient with developmental disabilities.

These concise publications provide background on developmental disabilities in general and address oral health problems common among affected persons. Strategies for care, covering such topics as mobility, neuromuscular and behavior problems, sensory impairment, and other treatment considerations, are discussed in the context of the general dental office.

Individual booklets on oral health and autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and mental retardation offer practical guidance on adapting standard practices to accommodate people with disabilities.

To support your efforts in the dental office, a guide for caregivers has also been developed that details the important role they play at home in maintaining good oral health for their family member or client with special needs. A publication for the dental team on safe wheelchair transfer completes the series, which aims at reducing a significant barrier to care by increasing provider knowledge of the oral health management of people with developmental disabilities.

Booklets in this series

- *Continuing Education: Practical Oral Care for People With Developmental Disabilities*
- *Practical Oral Care for People With Autism*
- *Practical Oral Care for People With Cerebral Palsy*
- *Practical Oral Care for People With Down Syndrome*
- *Practical Oral Care for People With Mental Retardation*
- *Wheelchair Transfer: A Health Care Provider's Guide*
- *Dental Care Every Day: A Caregiver's Guide*

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